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Colby recommends end to building nuclear arms

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William E. Colby, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, supports a nuclear freeze. Not a unilateral freeze, but an end to construction of new nuclear weapons by both the Soviet Union and the United States.

Colby said in Topeka Tuesday that both sides should stop building new nuclear weapons. "There is an advantage to both sides. I don't trust the Soviets but we have to live in this world and both can live better if the production of such new weapons is stopped," he said.

Colby appeared at Washburn University's White Concert Hall to deliver this year's Oscar S. Stauffer Lecture honoring the late Topeka publisher and founder of Stauffer Communications Inc.

Colby said that, although he has not seen the movie, "The Day After," filmed in Lawrence and showing the aftermath of nuclear devastation, he thinks Americans need to know the effect of nuclear weapons. "The Day After" is scheduled to be shown on the ABC television network at 7 p.m. Sunday.

"It's just a fact of life," Colby said in Topeka Tuesday. "We are just half an hour away from Russian missiles in Siberia." He said people tend to think of nuclear weapons as unreal.

The real purpose of intelligence gathering today is to ease tensions, Colby said, and not to engage in the cloak-and-dagger activities that the CIA, and other agencies, have sometimes been involved in.

Colby outlined the evolution of the CIA since the beginning of World War II. He also held a press conference before his lecture. Colby headed the intelligence agency from 1973 until 1976. During his CIA career, which began in 1950, Colby served as station chief in Saigon, Vietnam, from 1959 through 1962. He stayed active in Vietnam affairs as chief of plans, Far East Division, through 1968, and then became assistant director and then director of the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support in Vietnam.

Colby said the Central Intelligence Agency was formed after the disaster at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. The United States had all kind of information about Japanese intentions in the Pacific at that time, but the information was scattered among the various branches of military services.

"We had all kinds of information but not centralized where it could be looked at," he said. The CIA was created to address that problem, he said.

And in those early years, many thought intelligence gathering should be outside the law, Colby said. In fact, the agency was told to be more ruthless than the enemy and even respected senators said they didn't want to know about the methods used in gathering intelligence.

But eventually the idea was accepted that there was not an exception in the Constitution for intelligence, Colby said, and it was found that there were some things that the CIA should not have done.

"Today, we all accept constitutional limitations and there has been a veritable revolution in the intelligence system," he said.

Speaking of disarmament talks with the Soviets, Colby said in 1946 the elder statesman, Bernard Baruch, proposed that all nations give up nuclear capability, with inspection teams to verify compliance. But Josef Stalin, the Soviet dictator, turned down the proposal as American espionage.

And in 1963, President John F. Kennedy proposed the first limited test ban treaty, with no further nuclear tests. But the Soviets and Americans couldn't agree on the number of inspections each year, and the agreement fell through.

Colby said the United States received "clear requests for assistance from South American countries" before going there. And he said he understood the necessity of restricting the press during the military operation in Grenada.

"Obviously, in America, it is natural for the press to want to be in on everything, Colby said.

"There is a role for covert activity and covert military activities," Colby said. And Congress has not said "stop" to those activities. If both the Senate and the House vote to stop such activities, they are stopped, he said.